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ABSTRACT

Reported in this document are observations of early childhood education in England, Israel, Seychelles, and China. Specifically, observations focus on (1) teacher behavior, including behavior toward individuals, small groups, and large groups or whole classes; (2) teacher demonstration behaviors; (3) teacher verbal and nonverbal behaviors, such as physical proximity to students, responses to children's requests, verbal elaboration, requests for children's responses, and interventions intended to help children respond. With the exception of the Chinese, comparison revealed considerable similarity in educational systems designed for the child from 3 to 8 years of age. Chinese schooling was found to be far more group- and recitation-oriented than the other systems observed. Although techniques in most schools were similar, the extent of their use varied considerably. Concluding remarks comment on school organization and administration, briefly describing pupil/teacher ratio, teacher training, and financial support. (RH)

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Early Childhood Education Teacher Behaviors From a Cross Cultural Perspective

Patricia Ann Bell

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Teacher Action

Behavior

Demonstration

Teacher Verbal

Contributes bodily presence

Responds to requests of child

Adds more elaborate information

Asks child to respond

Intervenes, part or all of response

Some Notes on Organization and Administration

Pupil-Teacher ratio

Teacher training and in-service

Financial support

During the past five years observations of early childhood education in various cultures have identified similarities in the education of the young child, ages three years to eight years. Observations in Austria, Holland, England, Israel and Seychelles reveal striking similarities in teaching techniques and teaching style. The Chinese school environments are simply different as has been documented here and elsewhere[1]. Comparative data for Holland and Austria are not included.

Comparative statements about school systems have been presented[2], but no comparative data on teacher behaviors from a broad based cross-cultural perspective is available. The discussion herein identifies a substantially similar teacher repertoire for instructing the young child in various cultures. A plea might be made, therefore, for some commonality of early childhood programs.

Learning environments for children from the ages of three years to eight years included preschool environments and the first several grades of school. All schools were public schools and were "traditional" in approach. No environments for divergent populations, such as handicapped children, are included in this discussion, nor any special approaches, such as Montessori, included in this discussion.

Striking similarities in instructional style exist in environments for the child from three years to eight years, except in China, irrespective of the level of formal teacher training. In general the training for work with the under-fives requires vocational secondary training while training for work with the over-fives requires some post secondary training. However, the types of teacher behaviors, style of planned learning activities and general mode of approach with the young child transcend any particular teacher training strategy, at least in the sample of teachers observed in the five countries identified. The comparative data from England, Israel and Seychelles reveals some precise similarities as follows.

TEACHER ACTION

Behavior Toward Individuals: In all schools visited teachers dealt with some youngsters on an individual basis. In general, children's bids for time were acknowledged.

In the schools within the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA), which were visited, teachers dealt with children on an individual basis in such tasks as pre-reading skills, arts and crafts, preparing work space, redirecting children to their work, checking workbook pages, listening to children's requests for time or help, and the like.

Teachers in schools in Israel which were visited also dealt with children on an individual basis for some segments of the child's work, such as reading, art work, number concepts, redirecting children to their work, checking the progress of the child's work, responding to children's requests for help, and so on.

Teachers in Praslin, Republic of Seychelles, responded toward individual children in tasks dealing with reading skills, mathematical skills, arts, redirecting children to their work, listening to children's requests for time or help, and so on.

Teachers in the Chinese commune school which was visited did aid individual children with putting on costume items and picking out musical instruments. The group orientation and lack of equipment prohibited more than a few from participating at a time. At a Children's Palace in Shanghai the teachers dealt with children on an individual basis far more frequently than at the commune. At the elementary school individuals were asked to supply answers to questions.

Behavior Toward Small Groups: Teachers in all schools visited interacted with youngsters in small groups of two, three or four children.

Teachers in the ILEA schools dealt with children in small groups whenever the situation was appropriate. Children often collaborated in twos and threes to do art work, work with a box of cuisinaire rods on mathematical problems, and so on.

Teachers in the Israeli schools visited dealt with children in small groups. Teachers directed small groups toward different work areas and work assignments from time to time. In the particular schools and sessions observed, there was more individual child/teacher behavior and more whole group/teacher behavior evidenced and fewer episodes of small group/teacher interaction.

Teachers in the Praslin schools dealt with children in small groups when the situation warranted. Children were grouped at various tables and often a table of children worked at a particular academic skill. Teachers directed the activities of children in these groups, and supervised the ongoing activities of these groups within the classroom.

Observations of the Chinese children's skill in performances imply that small group/teacher directed practice sessions most probably occurred, although none were directly observed. No small group work was observed in any children's environment such as commune, school or Children's Palace.

Behavior Toward Large Groups or Whole Class: In all schools visited teachers interacted with the whole class or most of it. Group directives were common when dealing with requests to begin work in the morning, change activities, (such as recess, play period, lunch, dismissal), or come to attention.

Teachers within ILEA dealt with the whole class when directing children to start work in the morning, when changing activities periodically throughout the day, such as recess or lunch, or to come to attention for an announcement or directive.

Teachers in the Israeli schools observed dealt with the whole class to start the day's work, to redirect or change activities within the daily program, and to gain the attention of the group for announcements or directives.

Teachers in the Praslin schools dealt with the whole class to start the day's work, to redirect or change activities which were required of all class members, and so on.

Teachers in the Chinese schools observed did not demonstrate episodes of dealing with the whole class, but certainly the start of the lesson or theatrical practice must require some adult acknowledgement.

Thus, it seems that teachers in this sample responded to youngsters as the youngsters requested, or evidenced need for help. Teacher behavior toward children was toward individuals, small groups, and larger groups or the whole class. Teacher behavior varied as the needs of class members indicated or, as in China, the program called for.

TEACHER DEMONSTRATION

Teachers demonstrated skills, activities and sequencing of learning activities in the ILEA school, the Israeli schools and the Praslin schools. Teachers demonstrated for individuals, for several children, or for a table or two of children, and at times for the whole class. Much of this type of assistance depended upon the physical layout of the room and a teacher's mode of presenting work. In environments where children had individual seating arrangements, children

were sometimes grouped and sometimes remained separated. Thus, demonstrations were oriented toward small groups at one table, two tables together, several individual seats grouped together, individual children, or the whole class, depending upon the type of activity being undertaken. The Chinese program of children performing precluded teacher demonstrations. In the elementary school no teacher demonstrations were observed. At the Children's Palace teachers aided children by demonstrating in art, music and dance.

Teachers within the ILEA schools visited were observed demonstrating academic skills such as writing letters, numbers, and words for students to copy, art skills such as mixing paint, cutting with scissors, organizing work and the like.

Teachers in the Israeli schools demonstrated to individual children when dealing with pre-reading skills, letter and number concepts, art activities, physical coordination skills, and so on. Many observations included plays or special activities performed by children, and it is reasonable to surmise that some teacher deomonstration is a component part of theatrical production.

Teachers in the Praslin schools visited demonstrated number work, using counters, size-color-shape selections in a series of exercises dealing with multi-dimensional sorting tasks, and the like.

No teacher demonstrations were observed in the schools visited in China. Demonstrations were observed in the Children's Palace during dance, art, and music activities.

TEACHER VERBAL

Teachers spoke to children individually, in small groups, in larger groups, and to the whole class when situations warranted. Teachers addressed children individually when helping the child with a task, evaluating work, redirecting children to the task at hand, and so on. Small groups were addressed when the teacher was explaining to or directing several youngsters at a task. The whole class was addressed when a matter pertained to everyone. The teachers in this sample spoke to children to control them, to offer information, to suggest particular learning skills to work on, and to offer encouragement about the work at hand. All teachers observed spoke to individuals or groups as the need arose.

Teachers in the ILEA school spoke to children on a rather continual basis, whether as individuals or groups or as a whole class. Teachers addressed children's requests for information, assistance, and sharing of ideas on an individual basis. Teachers addressed small groups while explaining various academic or art activities when children's seating made small groups a convenient classroom organization, and when children were brought together for an activity such as music, story or art. In some schools children were divided into small groups for academic and play periods. Teachers addressed the whole class for such items as daily routine, announcements, changes in schedule, and when matters pertained to the classroom as a whole.

Teachers in Israeli schools spoke to children individually or in small groups, or to the group as a whole as the need arose. Comments directed to individuals generally dealt with one's work and one's behavior such as helping the child with a task, elaborating on a child's work, redirecting the child, and so on. Teachers spoke to groups when a group was working on a project or learning tasks. Teachers addressed the class as a whole about matters concerning everyone, such as daily activities, schedule, and so on.

Teachers in the Praslin schools spoke to individuals, small groups, larger groups, and the whole class, depending on the needs of the moment. Teachers spoke to individuals about their work, their behavior, suggesting some other work activity a child might do, and so on. Most comments to individuals dealt with the work requested of the child, the child's progress on this work, and subsequent work the child could do. Most of the teachers' comments to children who worked in small groups at tables dealt with the work at hand, or changing to new work activities. Teachers' comments to the group as a whole were directed toward the daily activities, schedule for the day, getting ready for lunch or dismissal, and so on.

Teachers in the Chinese schools observed were quite different in their verbal behavior. At the commune school the teachers spoke to various individuals about the hats and musical instruments, and to the small groups to start them and seat them after their turns. No comments were made to the children sitting around the edge of the room viewing the performance. The teacher in the elementary school was reciting and the children were repeating the statements. At the Children's Palace the teachers spoke to individuals in the art activities and dance activities. In the music activities the verbal directives were toward the whole group of children.

Contributes Bodily Presence: Some teachers in schools observed moved closer to the youngsters with whom they were interacting, especially if checking the youngsters' work, controlling behavior or helping the child with a task. When the comments pertained to one child or a few children, the teacher often moved closer to those with whom she wished to interact.

Teachers in the ILEA schools observed dealt with youngsters in a one-to-one mode very frequently, and were often in close proximity to the child. Teacher

activities such as writing words for children, listening to reading and checking work pages were carried out often in a one-to-one mode with the teacher in close proximity to the child. Teachers also moved closer to a small group or a table of children when aiding or directing such a group in academic skills, art activities and the like. When addressing the whole classroom, the teacher was within the groups' classroom, usually looking out over the whole class.

Teachers in the Israeli schools moved closer to those with whom they were conversing, whether it was one child or a small group of children. Such proximity behavior usually involved dealing with individuals or small groups in giving directions and supervising children's work progress. When dealing with the entire class, the teacher was in the classroom area with the children and was orienting toward the children.

Teachers in the Praslin schools moved closer to those individuals or small groups with whom they were dealing. Such instances usually occurred when teachers were dealing with children's work or behavior, such as checking on children's progress with a lesson, making certain the child was working on the requested information, and so on. Teachers moved closer to those children whom they were helping, whether on an individual or small group basis. When some directive pertained to the whole classroom, teachers dealt with the whole group and were within the classroom orienting toward the children.

In the Chinese commune schools observed the teachers moved to the props area with the youngsters in order to affix the hats and help youngsters select the appropriate instruments. Otherwise, all adult time was spent playing dance music on a foot pedal organ, or sitting and watching the children perform. In the Chinese elementary school the teacher remained at the front of the room, reciting with the children. At the Children's Palace, the teachers moved

toward children they were aiding in art and dance, while the teachers in the music groups remained at the front of the group conducting.

Responds to Request of Child: In all schools observed, bids for time were acknowledged for the most part. No school or teacher made it a practice to disregard the requests of a child. Teachers dealt with bids for time by responding to requests for help with academic tasks, art activities, the use of supplies and equipment, supervising a child's work progress, suggesting a sequence of work, redirecting a child's work, and so on.

Teachers in the ILEA schools observed responded to the many requests of children. Teachers provided assistance in academic pursuits, arts and crafts activities, self-care skills, and in out-of-doors play activities. The ILEA teachers observed dealt with children on a one-to-one mode more often than other school systems observed during this period of observation. In general, requests from children were responded to.

Teachers in the Israeli schools observed responded to individual request of children. Teachers were observed providing assistance in academic areas, and at some out-of-doors activities. Much one-to-one behavior was observed. Children enjoyed simply talking to the teachers and telling about something which had happened.

Teachers in the Praslin schools responded to the individual requests of children. Younger children made more requests for help or just wanted to share some experience more than older children. In general, responses to individuals dealt with acknowledging work which children had completed, sequencing work and redirecting children's work activities.

No actual requests for teacher time or help were seen in the Chinese environments for children. Adults helped children, but no direct requests for teacher aid were observed. Perhaps persons from without are insensitive to the child's or system's subtle cues used to request adult responses.

Adds More Elaborate Information: In some schools teachers added more elaborate information by explaining, questioning, comparing, searching out an object or item for comparison, and so on.

In the ILEA schools teachers talked about the children's work, often adding more information, explaining something in greater detail, suggesting a next step to the learning activity, and so on. Teachers encouraged children to use information and extend it through such activities as work pages, table displays, workbooks, collections of items which the whole class contributed to, writing stories, bulletin board displays of collected items, and so on. Teachers added more elaborate information verbally and there was evidence somewhere in all schools visited that the expansion of information went beyond the verbal level.

In the Israeli schools teachers explained ideas and concepts, and added more information when children were reading, doing art work, and so on. Teachers encouraged children to extend their information through visual displays around the periphery of rooms, bulletin boards, and horizontal displays. No table displays were noted, as in the ILEA schools, nor were any collections of items which the whole class contributed to noted. In all schools visited there was evidence of learning beyond the particular classroom lesson.

In the Praslin schools, teachers discussed the task at hand. Teachers encouraged children to do illustrative art work, writing exercises, visual displays and the like, to extend their learnings.

Chinese environments were devoid of any suggestion of taking the rote information of the lesson and extending it verbally, or by any visual display.

Asks Child to Respond: In most schools the teachers asked children to respond to some part of the lesson, such as identifying letters, words, numbers, sizes, shapes, colors, participating in responsibilities of the day, passing out workbooks, performing, and so on.

In the ILEA schools teachers asked children to respond very frequently. Children were asked to share their stories with the group, or to carry out some responsibility for the group, such as to pass out supplies, materials or workbooks. When teachers supervised children's reading, number work, writing, art activities, and so on, they asked children about the work. Children were requested to respond, for the most part, on a one-to-one basis with the teacher.

In the Israeli schools teachers were observed dealing with children on a one-to-one verbal response level in reading and art activities. During group activities various children were asked to respond also. Most instances of asking a child to respond were on a one-to-one basis with the teacher. Children were asked to carry out various responsibilities for the group, such as passing out workbooks, and supplies, and so on.

In the Praslin schools children were asked to respond on a one-to-one basis with the teacher. Children were asked, also, to respond on a one-to-group basis for certain lesson exercises. Children were asked to carry out various responsibilities for the group, such as passing out workbooks or materials, putting away supplies, and so on.

In China the observations of asking a child to respond individually took place in the commune school for the child with a solo, and in the elementary school occasionally children were asked to recite. In the Children's Palace no child was asked to respond individually.

Intervenes, Part or All of Response: Teachers were observed helping children respond to questions. This was noted in each ILEA school. It was also noted in the Israeli schools and Praslin schools. Teacher intervention was not noted in the Chinese schools.

Teachers in the ILEA schools helped children when they were unable to continue in whole or in part. Teachers helped spell words, do mathematics, sequence work, and so on. When children did not continue the discussion, thereby not responding to some question, teachers usually helped the child progress by supplying letters, sounds of letters, pronunciation of words, sums, what comes next in a sequence, and so on. When the child seemed able to continue with the brief help, most teachers encouraged the child to continue. If the child needed help with the complete task, teachers usually helped the child to completion. Teachers usually offered some initial help and waited a bit to ascertain whether or not more intervention was needed for the child to see the task to completion. Teachers usually continued with the question until the correct response was available to the child.

Teachers in Israeli schools intervened in part or in whole when children needed help. Such aid was observed in reading, reading comprehension and reading readiness. These language arts activities were being observed on a one-to-one basis of child and teacher, where the teacher intervened with the assistance

the child required to continue on with the lesson. This aid was rendered in a helpful tone in order to enable the child to continue.

Teachers in the Praslin schools intervened in whole or in part when a child's progress faltered. Teachers were observed helping children with letters, number work, multi-tailed sorting tasks and the like. Teachers helped children continue the learning task when they needed help and the determination of how much intervention a child needed in order to continue was made as the learning task progressed. When a child needed help to complete a learning task, teachers gave as much help as was necessary.

Teacher intervention in whole or in part was not observed in the Chinese commune school or the elementary school. In the Children's Palace art classes the teachers sometimes helped children center the linoleum block type block printers on the paper and assessed the thickness of the paint.

The comparison of various educational systems on the dimensions discussed reveals considerable similarity when dealing with educational strategies for the child from 3 years to 8 years of age, with the exception of Chinese schooling which is far more group and recitation oriented than the other systems observed. Techniques used in most schools are similar; however, the extent to which they are used varies considerably. For example, the ILEA schools evidenced the greatest utilization of supplemental learning displays and group contribution to same (displays, display tables, in essence "show and tell" type activities). ILEA schools in this sample also dealt with children on a one-to-one basis more often than this mode of instruction was observed in other schools. Chinese environments were the most spartan and employed group recitation or group behavior as the main method of teaching.

It is probable that teachers do that which they can do and know how to do. ILEA schools observed were less crowded, had more equipment and employed teachers with more training and personal knowledge resources. The crowdedness and sparcity of equipment in the Chinese and Seychelles environments precluded some luxuries, such as table displays.

It does seem that the behavioral repertoire of teachers in the schools observed is very similar. That which stands out is the extent to which certain teaching strategies are used, and the creativity, resourcefulness and imagination of the teachers within the schools.

SOME NOTES ON ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

The pupil-teacher ratio varies from school to school, but generally the ratio is smaller with younger children and larger for older children. For the 'under-fives' the ratio is about 1 adult for every 10-15 children, and for ages 5 onward, the ratio is more near 1 adult for 20-30 children.

Teacher Training

Teacher training for children of this age is generally several years of training, none of which must be at the 4-year baccalaureate degree level. In recent years some English BSc persons have become employed in the primary grades, but such cases are rare. In most cases, teachers of the under-fives have only a one or two-year training program, and the level of secondary education may be less than that required of those planning to work with the over-fives. In China no training is required in order to work with the under-fives. In no country visited is it contemplated that elementary level teachers be prepared on a 4-year baccalaureate degree level, nor is it contemplated that substantial higher education will enhance the learning environments of the under-fives.

Inservice training opportunities exist in most countries, but the overwhelming sentiment is toward the over-fives; no country visited considers the under-fives as equal in importance to the over-fives, at least with respect to teacher training.

Teachers within the ILEA area have available short one-day sessions, multi-day sessions and, of course, proximity to course work; in essence, much to choose from.

Israeli teachers have ample opportunities for inservice work and formal course work as well.

The Republic of Seychelles has recently begun supporting a new emphasis on inservice to take place during August for the most part.

No inservice opportunities were provided for teachers in the Chinese schools visited, although the government hopes to do so.

Financial Support

All schools visited were public schools, open to children in designated geographical areas, supported by the governments of various countries. The Children's Palace in Shanghai has been included here because it is an instructional setting. However, children are usually 8 years of age or older, and the population is highly selective of the best talent from the public schools within a particular geographical area. The Chinese commune school is supported by that commune.

NOTES

1. Kessen, William (Ed.). Childhood in China. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975.

2. Austin, Gilbert R. Early Childhood Education. New York: Academic Press, 1976.